

POSTAL NEWS

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1. Big mail delivery

Monday, November 30, 2009

Big mail delivery

The National Postal Museum has a new favorite philatelist. The Associated Press reported that California investor William H. Gross auctioned off two of his stamp collections last week to raise money for the museum. Sold at Spink Shreves Galleries, a stamp auction house in New York City, the collections snagged \$3.2 million.

According to the Smithsonian Institution, Gross, who founded Pacific Investment Management Co. in California, has pledged \$8 million to build a 12,000-square-foot gallery extension at street level near Union Station. The new gallery, which is scheduled to open in 2012, will house some of Gross's most special items, including four 1918 "Inverted Jennys," a 24-cent stamp of a flying Curtiss JN-4 biplane mistakenly printed with the plane upside down. In November 2007, an Inverted Jenny was auctioned for \$977,500.

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KOKUA LINE

2. U.S. postmaster should get report of mail fraud

By June Watanabe

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Nov 27, 2009

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QUESTION: I received a letter with a return address of Des Voeux Road Central, Central No. 39 (World Wide House) 28F. It had a Taiwan canceled postage stamp. Inside was an ad inviting the public to buy its travel services to Southeast Asia and other parts of the world. It also included two scratch-off award cards, one of which was a prize of \$150,000 and instructions to call a number to claim the prize. Thinking it to be a scam, I sent it to the U.S. Postmaster General. The next day, I got the envelope back with a sheet advising people to report mail theft and mail fraud at (877) 876-2455. I called the number and punched the buttons as instructed but got nowhere.

Why can't the post office forward the mail scam to the appropriate destination so that other postmen do not have to deliver them? The postal service seems to want to discourage fraud reporting. The postal service is placing the burden of fraud and scam on its customers on the domestic level, when it should coordinate in breaking up the scam with the postal service of the country of origin.

ANSWER: It does seem like a waste of time and effort on both sides. However, "It appears this was an unusual occurrence," according to Postal Inspector Hilary Rickher, based in San Francisco. She said the normal procedure is for complaints involving possible crimes sent to the Postmaster General's Office to be forwarded to the Inspection Service. The customer would then be notified the complaint was received and being investigated.

In the meantime she outlined the way consumers can report potential mail fraud.

Go to the Web site postalinspectors.uspis.gov, where you can download and fill out a fraud complaint form. Or, you can print and fill out the form, then mail it and the mail fraud solicitation received to the local Inspection Service office. Inspection Service mailing addresses can also be found on the Web site.

Rickher said consumers also may report fraud by calling the Postal Inspection Service's fraud complaint center at (877) USMAIL5 (877-876-2455).

A third possibility: "Some post offices will accept fraud complaint forms and supporting documents from postal customers and forward the complaints to the Inspection Service," she said.

As to working with other countries to thwart the scammers: "Postal inspectors are intricately involved in six Canadian Cross-Border Fraud Partnerships," she said.

"Additionally, postal inspectors work with foreign postal administrations, international organizations like the Universal Postal Union and law enforcement entities to improve security of the mail worldwide and protect society from criminal enterprises that use the mail to further their schemes."

MAHALO

To Dr. Rick Williams for his service to the community over the years. He has been my OB/GYN for around 15 years now, and I'd like to thank him for his generous and kind heart. Thank you for taking such good care of me for so long. I really appreciate it! God bless Dr. Williams. — Reiko Stiver

3. Postal Service mail tracking system doesn't deliver

BY GAUTHAM NAGESH 12/01/2009

The U.S. Postal Service's new bar code system for tracking mail has been delivered behind schedule, over cost and without key functionalities, according to a report from the Government Accountability Office.

USPS began the Intelligent Mail program in 2003 with the goal of developing one system that could interact with its more than 25 separate information technology systems and consolidate more than 30 types of bar codes. But according to a report (GAO-10-145) released on Monday, the system has experienced delays and missteps due to deficiencies in USPS' program management and acquisition offices.

The system was scheduled to be completed in January, but instead was delivered in two phases -- the first in May and the second on Nov. 29. The Postal Service did not respond to multiple requests for comment by the time this story was posted.

Despite the 10-month delay, the new system lacks a number of key functionalities, according to David Powner, director of information technology management issues at GAO. For example, Powner said Intelligent Mail was supposed to automate the acceptance process so senders would receive an acknowledgement when their mail had been delivered, but the system does not have this capability. It also does not significantly consolidate the types of bar codes used to trace mail, and it is not yet interoperable with other mail tracking and delivery systems.

"Looking at benefits in terms of reducing costs and improving service, no we're not there yet," said Powner, adding those functionalities would have to be built into future updates of Intelligent Mail. "We want to see how the existing 30 bar codes go away."

Powner highlighted inadequate oversight of contractors as a concern. The report noted at least two situations in which contractors were allowed to oversee themselves.

"There are ways to mitigate the risk, but that's clearly an unhealthy contractor arrangement," Powner said. "Over time the Postal Service saw the conflict there. We will be following up on that, it's something we clearly want to avoid."

GAO also said USPS' \$116 million life cycle cost estimate for the project was inaccurate, because it did not include the cost of integrating Intelligent Mail with other IT systems, nor did it include the costs of any future updates, which Powner said will be necessary given the system's deficiencies. He declined to speculate on the true life cycle cost of the program, but said it would be significantly higher than \$116 million.

The watchdog agency recommended USPS craft a comprehensive cost estimate and project plan, which would include details, features and deadlines for future releases of the system. But USPS disagreed that a comprehensive cost estimate is necessary, arguing that it is more important for it to remain dynamic on such a large procurement. Powner took issue with that approach, stating a cost estimate is crucial to planning and evaluating a large system acquisition.

4. Holiday Stamps are a Postal Tradition

By Marilyn Loeser

Tuesday, December 1, 2009

You can have daily headlines from FedSmith.com delivered right to your desktop each business morning. The service is free and you don't get junk e-mail as the price of your subscription. Just visit our newsletter page to sign up!

Marilyn (Thorbahn) Loeser is a writer/editor for the Postal Service. Marilyn has been a journalist for more than 30 years and is currently a freelance feature writer specializing in travel.

December means holidays. Holidays mean greeting cards. And the Postal Service has, once again, created several festive postage stamps to help speed your holiday greetings on their way.

On the whimsical side are Winter Holidays, stamps featuring a reindeer, snowman, gingerbread man, and toy soldier. Bright colors outline the figures along with borders of evergreens, stars, wreaths, and holly — adding a cheerful touch to the First-Class stamps.

A new Hanukkah stamp has been added to the holiday lineup. The new design features a photograph of a menorah with nine lit candles.

The menorah was designed by Lisa Regan of the Garden Deva Sculpture Company in Tulsa, OK, and photographed by Ira Wexler of Braddock Heights, MD. Carl T. Herrman of North Las Vegas, NV, was the art director.

The 2009 Hanukkah stamp is the third U.S. issuance to commemorate the holiday. The Postal Service issued its first Hanukkah stamp in 1996. A design featuring an ornate dreidel followed in 2004.

A new Kwanzaa stamp also was added this year.

Kwanzaa, a non-religious holiday that takes place over seven days from December 26 to January 1, draws on African traditions and takes its name from the phrase for "first fruits" in Swahili, a widely spoken African language.

Stamp artist Lloyd McNeill of New York City, under the direction of Carl T. Herrman, created the festive, brightly colored design.

This is the third stamp design issued in celebration of Kwanzaa. The first Kwanzaa commemorative stamp was issued in 1997.

This year's Christmas: Madonna and Sleeping Child by Sassoferrato stamp is from an original painting — more than 300 years old.

The painting was purchased in 1926 by American media entrepreneur William Randolph Hearst, an avid collector and patron of the arts.

Hearst amassed a renowned collection of artwork and artifacts which is displayed at Hearst Castle in San Simeon, CA, where Hearst lived during his lifetime. Today it is open to the public as part of the California State Park System.

Since 1978, the theme of each traditional Christmas stamp has been the Madonna and Child. The 2009 featured artwork is by Italian artist Giovanni Battista Salvi (1609-1685), more commonly known as Sassoferrato. The issuance of the stamp coincides with the 400th anniversary of the birth of the artist.

Like them? You can use them next year too

Although I'm sure the Postal Service will issue new holiday stamps next year, if you really like this year's offering, you can use them without any added postage — First-Class Mail will remain 44 cents in 2010.

So, what exactly do you get for your 44 cents?

In addition to getting your letter or card across town or to another state, if someone has moved in the last year, your greeting will be forwarded to them. After one year when the forwarding expires, you'll be notified of the new address for an additional six months. In fact, more than 2 billion pieces of mail are forwarded every year.

In addition to all 50 states, you pay First-Class domestic mail rate if you're sending correspondence to any military base around the world, or any American territory including Guam, Puerto Rico and the American Virgin Islands. The Postal Service provides universal service — no matter where you live.

USPS also has its own arm of the law — the Postal Inspection Service — helping to protect your privacy and prevent mail fraud.

And did you know a postmark can provide documentation that a legal brief was filed by the deadline and that by sending yourself a manuscript through the mail, and not opening it when you receive it; the postmark shows the legal copyright date?

Letters are picked up from your mailbox free-of-charge. There are no hidden surcharges — no matter where you live. And rural carriers can provide stamps and other products and services for customers who live off the beaten path.

Tax dollars don't support the Postal Service. It is operated solely from the sale of its products and services.

Want to compare what you get for 44 cents and what you'd have to pay in another — often much smaller — industrialized country?

First-Class letter mail equivalent prices in U.S. dollars – 1 ounce or 20 grams:
Norway – \$1.25

Finland – \$1.12
Denmark – \$1.03
Canada – 98 cents
Switzerland – 92 cents
Italy – 84 cents
Belgium – 83 cents
Japan – 83 cents
Greece – 83 cents
France – 80 cents
Austria – 78 cents
Germany – 77 cents
Ireland – 77 cents
Sweden – 77 cents
Israel – 77 cents
Luxembourg – 75 cents
Portugal – 70 cents
Great Britain – 66 cents
New Zealand – 64 cents
Netherlands – 63 cents
Iceland – 62 cents
Spain – 55 cents
Australia – 54 cents
United States – 44 cents

So, send a letter, a card or a photo — it's that time of year again and First-Class Mail is a bargain!

Ho, ho, ho!!

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